

Durham Research Online

Deposited in DRO:

15 October 2018

Version of attached file:

Accepted Version

Peer-review status of attached file:

Peer-reviewed

Citation for published item:

Heffernan, Anne (2016) 'Blurred lines and ideological divisions in South African youth politics.', *African affairs.*, 115 (461). pp. 664-687.

Further information on publisher's website:

<https://doi.org/10.1093/afraf/adw052>

Publisher's copyright statement:

This is a pre-copyedited, author-produced version of an article accepted for publication in *African Affairs* following peer review. The version of record Heffernan, Anne (2016). *Blurred lines and ideological divisions in South African youth politics.* *African Affairs* 115(461): 664-687 is available online at: <https://doi.org/10.1093/afraf/adw052>.

Use policy

The full-text may be used and/or reproduced, and given to third parties in any format or medium, without prior permission or charge, for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes provided that:

- a full bibliographic reference is made to the original source
- a [link](#) is made to the metadata record in DRO
- the full-text is not changed in any way

The full-text must not be sold in any format or medium without the formal permission of the copyright holders.

Please consult the [full DRO policy](#) for further details.

BLURRED LINES: IDEOLOGICAL DIVISIONS IN SOUTH AFRICAN YOUTH POLITICS

ANNE HEFFERNAN*

ABSTRACT

Ideological affiliations like Africanism, charterism, and Black Consciousness shaped the political boundaries of student and youth political groups in South Africa during the tumultuous 1980s. These delineations have also been used in the secondary literature to understand organizational competition and when considering how young activists negotiated contested political ground. However, this article suggests that the boundaries between opposing organizations were often blurred by their overlapping use of competing ideologies; it further argues that these divisions, although articulated ideologically, were rooted in organizational affiliation and competition for political influence and territory. It analyses the ideological development of the Congress of South African Students, the Azanian Students' Organization, and the South African Youth Congress, and tracks the changing scope for ideological expression within charterist student and youth formations. It suggests that during the 1980s the scope for differing ideological expression narrowed, and links this process to the ANC's efforts to establish hegemony within the charterist movement. The article finally extends this analysis to the ANC Youth League's use of ideology after apartheid, and considers how ideological difference within youth politics is beginning to be expressed outside the fold of charterism.

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN SOUTH AFRICAN POLITICS have reinforced the realization that, more than twenty years after the attainment of majority rule, race remains an unresolved question in the 'Rainbow Nation'. From the failure of programmes like Black Economic Empowerment to achieve widespread economic opportunity among previously oppressed racial groups¹ to recent movements to #Transform South Africa's universities², it is increasingly evident that the official platform of nonracialism propagated by the African National Congress has failed to adequately address the country's long history of race-based discrimination. Authors like Bond³ and Marais⁴ have argued that this is a consequence of the ANC's neoliberalism, and failure to address South Africa's class stratification. I suggest that the enduring significance of race in post-apartheid South Africa also has roots in the marginalization of divergent ideologies that resulted from the ANC's efforts to establish its hegemony in South African politics. This project was undertaken by the movement in exile beginning in the late 1970s, and was effectively completed by the time of the democratic transition in 1994. However, the resurgence of race as a critical issue in South Africa's political discourse, and particularly the reprisal

* Anne Heffernan (anne.heffernan@wits.ac.za) is an Andrew Mellon Post-doctoral Fellow in the History Workshop at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. Special thanks to Jason Robinson and Shireen Hassim for their valuable suggestions on earlier drafts of this article.

¹ Roger Southall, 'Ten propositions about black economic empowerment in South Africa', *Review of African Political Economy*, 34, 111 (2007), pp. 67-84.

² For a discussion of the student protests around issues of transformation (and the statue of Cecil Rhodes), which began in early 2015 at the University of Cape Town, see Rebecca Hodes, "'The Rhodes statue must fall': UCT's radical rebirth", *Daily Maverick*, 13 March 2015, <<http://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2015-03-13-the-rhodes-statue-must-fall-ucts-radical-rebirth/>> (1 June 2015).

³ Patrick Bond *The elite transition: From apartheid to neoliberalism in South Africa* (Pluto Press, London, 2000).

⁴ Hein Marais, *South Africa: Limits to change: The political economy of transition* (University of Cape Town Press, Cape Town, 2001).

of Black Consciousness ideas among student movements, suggests a failure to adequately engage some of these issues in contemporary South Africa and, arguably, a failure of nonracialism itself.

This paper argues that one key way in which the ANC achieved hegemony was by absorbing opposing ideologies, particularly aspects of Black Consciousness and Africanism, into the fold of its nonracialism, which is based around the ideas of the Freedom Charter. To demonstrate this I identify key moments in the student movements of the 1980s when the boundaries between the competing ideologies of charterism, Black Consciousness, and Africanism were alternately blurred and sharpened, and seek to unpack the divisions between these ideologies. I argue that, although often taken as clearly delineated, these boundaries were porous. Though the ideas themselves were not clearly divided, conflict between organizations resulted in the use of those ideas to draw firm organizational boundaries. Understanding the content and uses of these ideologies in student politics during the 1980s is important for understanding their legacies in the post-apartheid dispensation. To support my argument, I analyse the ideologies of the Congress of South African Students, the Azanian Students' Organization, and the South African Youth Congress, and the ways that these have evolved and influenced ideology in youth politics after apartheid, particularly within the ANC Youth League.

Charterism, Africanism, and Black Consciousness were key points of self-identification for organizations in the 1980s, which took these traditions as their ideological parentage. They have also provided academics and observers with convenient ways to group the numerous organizations that emerged during this period. Some authors, like Seekings, have interrogated the ideological scope of affiliates of the UDF, and Charles Carter's study of the Alexandra Youth Congress explores that organization's relationship to the Freedom Charter.⁵ Despite these exceptions, it remains common for authors discussing the student movements of the 1980s to group organizations under their self-appointed banners of 'charterist', 'Black Consciousness', and 'Africanist', without fully exploring their ideological differences.⁶ In this article I contend that by the time of their adoption by student groups in the 1980s these divisions were based on differences of political affiliation rather than ideology, and that, for a period, student organizations allowed scope for a wide range of ideological expression within these frameworks.

My argument is supported by evidence from a range of sources – it draws on archival material produced by and about COSAS, AZASO, and SAYCO: press releases, private correspondence, public speeches, and official documents like constitutions and manifestoes illuminate not only the public platforms of these organizations, but also internal ideological debates. Oral sources – interviews that I and others have conducted – help contextualize these debates. The paper further brings together a survey of the literature on student politics in the 1980s and uses the case-specific analyses of a range of

⁵ See Jeremy Seekings, *The UDF: A history of the United Democratic Front in South Africa, 1983-1991* (David Philip, Cape Town, 2000), pp. 289-90 for a discussion of divisions within charterism under the UDF; Charles Carter, 'We are the progressives: Alexandra Youth Congress activists and the Freedom Charter, 1983-85', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 17, 2 (1991), pp. 197-220.

⁶ For example of an author's delineation of these ideas, see Badat's analysis of SANSCO (AZASO): Saleem Badat, *Black student politics: Higher education and apartheid from SASO to SANSCO, 1968-1990* (Human Sciences Research Council, Pretoria, 1999), p. 220; and Marks' discussion of charterist youth in Soweto: Monique Marks, *Young warriors: Youth politics, identity and violence in South Africa*. (Witwatersrand University Press, Johannesburg, 2001), pp. 129-33.

authors to draw out a new argument about the wider role of ideas in student politics in South Africa.

This article is situated in the literature on social movements – and student politics, in particular – in South Africa. It develops some of the ideas of ideological flexibility within the UDF that Jeremy Seekings has identified in organizations like the Release Mandela Campaign, and extends them to an analysis of key student and youth groups.⁷ It builds upon Gerhart's thesis of the use of ideology as a 'weapon' by bringing her analysis to bear on the 1980s.⁸ Following Marks⁹, I interpret the violence perpetrated by and between students and youth as a purposeful tool, but I further cast these internecine conflicts as an example of the politics of enmity – ideologically articulated, but organizationally delineated. My argument extends the existing literature by using these perspectives to analyse the role of ideology in youth politics in South Africa after apartheid. It considers the ways in which the ANC has established and maintained political hegemony and the extent to which the ANC Youth League has participated in that project. It also considers recent ideological fractures within youth and student politics that have diverged from this hegemony, locating these divisions in relation first to the flexible use of ideology and later the hardening of ideological spaces during the student movements of the 1980s.

Ideological roots and branches

The key division within South African liberation politics during the 1980s was ostensibly ideological, between 'charterist' adherents to the Freedom Charter (and supporters of the banned ANC) and the inheritors of Black Consciousness, the philosophy of African self-reliance that emerged from black universities in the 1970s. Black Consciousness overlapped and was compatible in some fundamental ways with the older idea of Africanism. Since its articulation by a generation of youth leaders in the 1940s, the racially exclusive focus of Africanism had challenged the pluralist alliances that were growing in South African opposition politics. A generation later, Black Consciousness used similar rhetoric and rationale to distance black students from white activists in order to create a discursive space where black activists could conceive and pursue a path to liberation.

The Freedom Charter was launched at the Congress of the People in 1955. It was a cooperative effort of the ANC, the South African Communist Party, the South African Indian Congress, and other organizations in the congress movement. Though the Charter covers a gamut of issues, from educational access to land ownership, its core principle is racial equality. In an overt challenge to the racial segregation of apartheid, it begins with the phrase 'South Africa belongs to all who live in it, black and white.' This principle – alternately described as multiracial and nonracial – came to be the defining characteristic that united groups under the banner of charterism, and one that distinguished them from Africanists.

⁷ Seekings, *The UDF*, p. 75.

⁸ Gail Gerhart, *Black power in South Africa: The evolution of an ideology* (University of California Press, Berkeley, CA, 1978), p. 19.

⁹ Marks, *Young warriors*, p. 5.

The years following the drafting of the Charter led to conflict within the ANC over the principle of multiracialism and the role of other racial groups (particularly white liberals and communists) in the anti-apartheid struggle. In 1959 these tensions reached a breaking point, and an Africanist faction within the ANC split from the party and formed the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC). This moment, which has been widely analysed¹⁰, marked the division between the multiracial ideals of charterist groups and the racially exclusive ideals of Africanist ones. It set the stage for this divide to be replicated in the production of future liberation organizations, which are the subject of this paper.

A decade after the PAC split from the ANC both organizations were in exile, and a new ideology developed on black, Indian, and coloured university campuses during the late 1960s and early 1970s. Black Consciousness was influenced by ideas from the contemporary Black Power movement in America and critics of colonialism like Frantz Fanon, as well as the ideas of Africanists in South Africa. Founder Steve Biko and other prominent BC activists drew on some of the ideals of Africanism by dismissing nonracial charterism and by championing black self-reliance, and psychological as well as physical liberation. They favoured a broadly inclusive definition of 'black' that included the other targets of apartheid oppression: Indians and coloureds. This measure of racial inclusivity was one of the significant divergences of BC from its Africanist predecessors. While Africanists had advocated African-only self-reliance, when Black Consciousness advocates declared 'Black man, you are on your own!'¹¹ they spoke to all members of South Africa's oppressed racial groups. In many ways Black Consciousness opened a distinctly new ideological space in South African liberation circles, but in its critiques of liberalism and multiracialism, and by advocating the exclusion of even sympathetic whites from the struggle, ideologically it shared some important tenets with Africanism.¹²

Around the same time that Black Consciousness was emerging on university campuses, the ANC began to shift from describing itself as 'multiracial' to 'nonracial'. Functionally this meant that interracial cooperation could take place *within* the organization, rather than only between sympathetic, single-race groups. Accordingly, in 1969, the ANC allowed non-Africans to become members (though only in exile; inside South Africa multiracialism was still employed).¹³ Notably, Black Consciousness activists also envisioned a 'nonracial' future for South Africa, but this was perceived as a goal that was only attainable *after* fundamental change throughout South African society: blacks needed space to psychologically overcome centuries of oppression, and whites needed to forsake all of their social, political, and economic privileges to be truly nonracial.¹⁴ If

¹⁰ For thorough discussions of the split see Tom Lodge, *Black politics in South Africa since 1945*, (Ravan Press, Johannesburg, 1983), pp. 80-8; and Gail Gerhart, *Black power in South Africa*, pp. 150-164.

¹¹ This slogan, coined by Barney Pityana for the South African Students' Organization (SASO), reflects the Black Consciousness position that black (in the BC sense) people had to be responsible for their own liberation; it arose as the movement's relations with sympathetic white organizations were breaking down. [Daniel Magaziner, *The law and the prophets: Black consciousness in South Africa, 1968-1977* (Ohio University Press, Athens, OH, 2010), p. 26-32.]

¹² This is supported by recent work on the Black Consciousness Movement. Magaziner notes that BC activists broadly favoured the PAC: 'They respected [Nelson Mandela] in spite of his organization', but 'Robert Sobukwe [the leader of the PAC] loomed large in Black Consciousness circles [...] Various activists recounted trips to visit "Prof." as a favourite initiation into political activism.' [Magaziner, *The law and the prophets*, pp. 141-2, 232n12.]

¹³ David Everatt, 'Non-racialism in South Africa: Status and prospects', *Politikon* 39, 1 (2012), pp. 5-28.

¹⁴ Magaziner, *The law and the prophets*, p. 31.

nonracialism was the destination, it could not also be the road to get there. Following this conflicted past, what nonracialism means in South Africa today is still unclear. Based on data gathered from focus groups in 2011, David Everatt declared, 'Non-racialism [...] is among the founding principles of the democratic South Africa's constitution, but has no real meaning.' As I will argue, such ideological blurring was characteristic of student organizations in the 1980s, and, as Everatt suggests, it has real implications in political discourse today.

The ascendancy of charterism and the Congress of South African Students

After a long period of dormancy, charterism's re-emergence in student politics developed during the 1976 Soweto uprising, a critical turning point in South African youth politics. Ideologically, though it was loosely organized by a Black Consciousness affiliate, the uprising allowed adherents of BC to mobilize alongside charterists under the banner of an educationally-specific issue: protesting the imposition of Afrikaans in township classrooms.¹⁵ It was the first time charterism had publically re-emerged in student politics since the banning of the ANC in 1960.

Three years later, the Congress of South African Students (or COSAS) capitalized upon those beginnings. COSAS built upon the permissive ideological space the uprising had created. It was the first 'congress' organization for students in South Africa since the banning of the ANC in 1960,¹⁶ and it was the first to officially adopt nonracialism and to support the Freedom Charter, preceding the formation of the United Democratic Front (UDF) - of which it would become an affiliate - by four years.

The delegates at COSAS' founding conference, Matona has argued, represented diverse political ideologies: charterists in the mold of the ANC were prominently represented, but there were also Black Consciousness delegates, members of the newly formed Azanian People's Organization (AZAPO), and other groups. This led to some debate over the new organization's ideological platform. 'On the question of a name, ANC sympathizers insisted that it should include the word "congress", while BC supporters proposed the Venda name "*Khuvhangano*" (Union) or alternatively, a name including "Azania".'¹⁷ The latter would clearly have aligned the new organization with AZAPO, which had inherited the mantle of Black Consciousness and adhered to a racially separatist philosophy. In the end, the charterists won the naming debate, and the Congress of South African Students was born. Early COSAS leaders signaled the ideological importance of this decision: Ephraim Mogale, COSAS' first president, said it 'was the first organization in South

¹⁵ Nozipho Diseko, 'The origins and development of the South African Student's Movement (SASM): 1968-1976', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 18, 1 (1992), pp. 40-62.

¹⁶ The Natal and Transvaal Indian Congresses were not banned and continued to exist as the internal remnants of the congress movement of the 1950s.

¹⁷ Tshediso Matona, *Student organization and political resistance in South Africa: An analysis of the Congress of South African Students, 1979-1985*, (University of Cape Town, unpublished honours dissertation, 1992), p. 45. The name Azania was originally adopted by the PAC in exile to reframe the cultural heritage of South Africa around a pre-colonial past. It gained currency with Africanists beyond the PAC and was adopted by BC groups and others in the 1980s.

Africa to put the masses back into the congress tradition, and by so doing [it was] joining the past with the present and guiding the people to nonracial democracy'.¹⁸

In spite of the naming debate, and Mogale's declaration in favour of nonracialism, initially COSAS provided space for both ideologies; it was open to all students in South Africa, regardless of political affiliation.¹⁹ This was facilitated by its early focus on educational concerns (particularly access, fees, and student-teacher relations), rather than broader political issues.²⁰ As COSAS described itself in a 1984 pamphlet:

[COSAS] saw the need to organize and educate students about their day to day problems in their schools such as corporeal punishment, lack of text books, unqualified teachers, poor exam results, unmarked scripts, etc. They saw the need to unite all students throughout the country, Africans, Indians and Coloureds.²¹

This racially inclusive language marked COSAS' emerging charterism, though it is worth noting that the groups they sought to unite - Africans, coloureds and Indians - were the same demographics Black Consciousness included under the banner of 'black'. COSAS did not attempt to cross the starkest colour line and include white students, who they perceived as difficult – if not impossible – to mobilize at the time:

The problem [of mobilization] only arised [sic] as far as white students were concerned; for black students there was no problem. [...] The white high schools of the time were by and large the terrain of the System and [the schools worked] to pit them against the black people, to mobilize them for the assault on black people. [...] But we had to leave it open – perhaps in future, the situation could change.²²

The interracial cooperation and inclusivity that were among COSAS' core principles, then, were perceived as possibilities for the future rather than ones to be pursued in the present. It is also important to note that, in spite of its rhetoric of multiracial organization, COSAS' units at the branch level – secondary schools – were, thanks to Bantu Education, racially singular in composition. No single branch was able to transcend apartheid's rigorous controls on race within schools, further demonstrating the gulf between the articulation of nonracialism and COSAS' ability to practice it.

By the 1980s what had earlier been the hesitant reemergence of charterism as an ideology among students gathered steam. Badat²³ and Seekings²⁴ have both suggested that the increased visibility of charterist organizations during the early 1980s influenced the renewed interest of students in charterism and multiracial ideology; they point to

¹⁸ Interview, Whitey Mohapi, Ephraim Mogale, and Lulu Johnson, Congress of South African Students. Undated, archived with the Community Video Education Trust (hereafter CVET) <<http://www.cvet.org.za/displayvideo.php?vid=2D-F5-179>> (15 May 2015).

¹⁹ COSAS Constitution, c. mid-1980s [Wits Historical Papers (hereafter WHP) AK2117 J3.22]; Interview, Whitey Mohapi, Ephraim Mogale, and Lulu Johnson, Congress of South African Students. Undated, archived with CVET <<http://www.cvet.org.za/displayvideo.php?vid=2D-F5-179>> (15 May 2015).

²⁰ *Rand Daily Mail*, 'New student body formed', 6 April 1979. [Gerhart Private Papers (hereafter GPP)]

²¹ COSAS Potchefstroom Pamphlet 'We Remember June 16: A Nation Mourns', 1984. [WHP AD1790]

²² Interview, Whitey Mohapi, Ephraim Mogale[quoted], and Lulu Johnson, Congress of South African Students. Undated, archived with CVET <<http://www.cvet.org.za/displayvideo.php?vid=2D-F5-179>> (15 May 2015).

²³ Badat, *Black student politics*, pp. 213-16.

²⁴ Seekings, *The UDF*, p.36.

increased activity by the ANC's armed wing *Umkhonto we Sizwe*, to the launch of the Release Mandela Committee that same year, which raised the profile of Nelson Mandela and other ANC political prisoners who had been in prison for nearly two decades, and to a publicity campaign around the Freedom Charter itself (the *Sunday Post* printed a copy alongside an article on the history of the document).²⁵ With the founding and growth of COSAS, and increasing visibility and adoption of the Freedom Charter, 1980 was the year that charterism - if not necessarily the banned movements that championed it - came out from underground.

Even from its early days COSAS was moving towards being an explicitly charterist organization – the first of its kind in nearly two decades – but a minority of members still identified with Black Consciousness. Whitey Mohapi, an early leader, recalled a group of students within COSAS who ‘call[ed] itself Azanian and wanted to use COSAS for Black Consciousness motives’.²⁶ Another student activist spoke of an entire COSAS branch in Kimberley that was ‘quite problematic’ because it was ‘Black Consciousness inclined’.²⁷ And in the most visible way the make-up of COSAS’s organization mirrored nothing so much as BC’s inclusive definition of ‘black’. Though students of the early 1980s were increasingly identifying with the Freedom Charter, what that meant in an ideological sense had yet to be settled. It was a question that was to be contested in COSAS and other organizations over the rest of the decade.

The suspension of Nkondo and AZASO’s turn to charterism

A year after COSAS was founded, the Azanian People’s Organization (AZAPO) launched its own student wing. Branches of the Azanian Students’ Organization (AZASO) were established at the five historically black universities and one training college; in later years, they expanded among technical and educational colleges, and to black students at the ‘open’ English-speaking universities (like the Universities of the Witwatersrand and Cape Town).

At its inception, AZASO espoused the Black Consciousness ideology of AZAPO and its BCM forerunners. It saw itself as the inheritor of the South African Students’ Organization’s mantle among black university students.²⁸ Many of its early members had been politicized through BC ideology and in the wake of the Soweto uprisings. The link to Black Consciousness was to be short-lived, however. From its very early days there were arguments within AZASO about its political philosophy. These were exacerbated by internal dissent over the suspension in early January 1980 of Curtis Nkondo as AZAPO’s President. Nkondo was a prominent figure in Soweto education circles; he had been a principal and chairman of the Soweto Teachers’ Action Committee, which supported student activists in the wake of June 1976. When he came to head AZAPO, he was particularly popular with their student supporters. In the role for only a few short months,

²⁵ *Ibid*; Badat, *Black student politics*, p. 216.

²⁶ Interview, Whitey Mohapi, Ephraim Mogale, and Lulu Johnson, Congress of South African Students. Undated, archived with CVET <<http://www.cvet.org.za/displayvideo.php?vid=2D-F5-179>> (15 May 2015).

²⁷ *Ibid.*, Anonymous speaker.

²⁸ Seekings, *The UDF*, p. 43.

Nkondo was suspended for 'violating [AZAPO] principle and policy and not respecting protocol.'²⁹ His suspension was met with angry condemnation by student groups, like COSAS and AZASO itself.³⁰

The violation of protocol of which Nkondo was accused was never publically stated by AZAPO, but it was considered an open secret that he had been suspended because his politics were too sympathetic to the ANC. As Joe Phaahla, an AZASO leader, stated in an interview with a student publication, '[S]ome of the people who were in AZAPO thought that why Mr Nkondo really had to go was because it was said that he was a "charterist".'³¹ After his suspension, Nkondo publically acknowledged this affiliation:

Adhering to the Freedom Charter is the only way in which we can mobilise the masses. Any deviation from this is, in my humble opinion, a complete betrayal of the struggle for liberation.³²

Divisions between Africanists and charterists were hardening in the early 1980s, and Nkondo's expulsion represented the end of the scope that had existed in the wake of the Soweto uprising and in COSAS' early days for student organizations to straddle the two camps.

Following AZAPO's suspension of President Nkondo, AZASO re-examined its own political philosophy. In December 1980, the interim committee of AZASO called a summit conference to discuss the issue at which 'the deficientcy [sic] of black consciousness philosophy as a rallying point was highlighted by various delegates.'³³ Among these deficiencies delegates noted that the appeal of Black Consciousness had been confined to black intellectuals.³⁴ The issue was hotly debated at the conference, and one delegate even threatened to walk out in protest at the adoption of a new charterist preamble to the AZASO Constitution.³⁵ However, the majority of student delegates present disagreed: they found that Black Consciousness was too narrow a framework for AZASO and 'that for the organization to play a meaningful role in the liberation struggle, a more broader [sic] but clearer approach to defining issues at stake should be adopted.' This dissension from its ideological roots caused the AZASO delegates to redraft the preamble of their constitution and to sever ties with AZAPO and its Black Consciousness ideology. It was more than two years before AZAPO formed a new student body to carry its torch, and by the time their Azanian Students Movement (AZASM) was born it lagged behind AZASO in organization and support on the campuses that had once been BC strongholds.³⁶ This organizational failure exacerbated the increasing divide of the Africanist inheritors of Black Consciousness from their original student base.

²⁹ *Rand Daily Mail*, 'Nkondo Indaba', 19 January 1980. [GPP]

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ 'Student Movement Today' interview with Joe Phaahla and Kate Philip, July 1983. p. 42. [WHP AG2635/A]

³² Curtis Nkondo, letter dated 7 August 1981. [University of Fort Hare Archive (hereafter UFH), AZAPO Collection, Box 13]

³³ South African Students' Press Union interview with Joe Phaahla, undated c. mid 1980s. [GPP]

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Anne Heffernan, *A history of youth politics in Limpopo, 1967-2003*, (University of Oxford, unpublished PhD dissertation, 2014) pp. 238-45.

By the mid-1980s, AZASO and AZASM embodied the often violent conflict between supporters of charterist and Africanist ideology. In late April 1985, AZASM held a meeting at The University of the North (Turfloop) to discuss its upcoming national convention. The meeting was interrupted when ‘a group of students shouting support for the Freedom Charter marched into the hall’ carrying an assortment of weapons and ‘a fracas broke out’.³⁷ During this confrontation, several members of AZASM and AZAPO, including the latter’s former president (and former Turfloop student and Black Consciousness activist) Lybon Mabasa, were assaulted and later hospitalized. As Mabasa described the incident:

They said I had been confusing a lot of people with the Black Consciousness philosophy and socialism. They beat me up with hammers and stones. I received a knife wound in the arm when I tried to block the attack. They told me to chant ‘Mandela’. I refused and they beat me up until I lost consciousness.³⁸

The attackers, who were ‘shouting support for the Freedom Charter’ and sought to make Mabasa chant support for imprisoned ANC leader Nelson Mandela, were members of AZASM’s on-campus rival, AZASO. This incident illustrates the degree to which divisions between charterist and Black Consciousness student groups had become violently polarized; far from the permissive space in earlier bodies like COSAS, there was heated conflict between AZASO and AZASM for influence and control on campuses. It also indicates the lack of ideological difference behind these conflicts; the AZASO students chanted support for the Freedom Charter, but displayed – with their dismissal of “confusing” socialism – little understanding or regard for some of its principles. In fact, the Freedom Charter had advocated economic redistribution long before groups like AZASM and AZAPO adopted the principle.³⁹

Such conflicts between members of the two groups were increasingly frequent, and even dissuaded some students from joining either group for fear of the violence. Jimmy Mohale, a Turfloop student in 1985 and 1986, recalled in an interview with Isak Niehaus:

There were many political organizations at the university and I sympathized with all of them. All of the student organizations fought for liberation, so I could not understand why they were fighting each other. [...] The big rivals were AZASO and AZASM. There was no tolerance. At one stage all the AZASM students had to leave our residence because their lives were being threatened [...] I did not understand this in-fighting. That is why I never wore a T-shirt of any organization.⁴⁰

Mohale’s description of the conflicts on campus as ‘in-fighting’ is revealing. As he points out, both organizations were fighting for liberation and, as this paper has argued, ideologically they overlapped: both groups supported forms of economic redistribution,

³⁷ ‘Students beat up ex-Azapo leader’, paper unknown, 22 April 1985. [GPP]; Interview, Lybon Mabasa, Johannesburg, 28 September 2011.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ During the height of Black Consciousness in the 1970s, class remained subordinate to the issue of race, but by 1979 and 1980 some BC activists were adopting a Marxist-Leninist class-based analysis of the situation in South Africa; Neville Alexander, an academic and former Robben Islander, was credited with influencing the adoption of these ideas in AZAPO. [Mbulelo Vizikhungo Mzamane and Bavusile Maaba ‘The Azanian People’s Organization, 1977-1990’, *The road to democracy in South Africa Vol. 4* (University of South Africa Press, Pretoria, 2010), pp. 1299-1360, pp. 1306-8.]

⁴⁰ Jimmy Mohale, quoted in Isak Niehaus, *Witchcraft and a life in the new South Africa* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2013), p. 58.

and even where nonracialism was espoused, COSAS and AZASO students did little to enact it, meaning that the membership of these groups and of AZASM looked very similar. Nonetheless, as the examples above indicate, such similarities did not lessen the violent confrontations between supporters of charterist organizations, like AZASO and the UDF, and supporters of Black Consciousness ones, like AZAPO.

This polarized opposition – epitomized by these violent clashes – can be more productively understood as a politics of enmity than through the prism of ideological difference. As I have argued thus far, ideologically both charterist and Africanist groups overlapped in policy and practice, yet the lines between them were starkly drawn and violently maintained. German political philosopher Carl Schmitt identified the distinction between friend and enemy as the core feature of all politics⁴¹, and recently his theory has been reprised and applied in African contexts. James Brennan has read the development of the socialist state in independent Tanzania in this context, and, in South Africa, Daniel Magaziner has applied it to conflict within the Black Consciousness Movement.⁴² Expanding on Magaziner, I argue that the division in student politics that is cast broadly as charterists versus Africanists/Black Consciousness is also essentially a politics of enmity – of who belongs and who does not – and, as Brennan argued, that this sometimes resulted in ‘purge categories’ as one side sought to eliminate the other. Monique Marks’ work on student and youth violence in Diepkloof, Soweto during the 1980s and 1990s supports this interpretation: ‘People or property symbolizing the apartheid state, as well as individuals who threatened the cohesiveness of the township or the hegemony of the Charterist movement, were targeted and attacked, verbally abused, beaten, and sometimes killed.’⁴³ As is clear from the description of violent clashes between AZASO and AZASM, these tactics were not restricted to township youth, but were replicated in student groups around the country.

In late 1986, AZASO leaders took the decision to change their organization’s name to the South African National Students’ Congress (SANSCO) to consolidate its charterism and relationship to affiliates (like COSAS) by including congress in its name, and to jettison the last nominal tie to its Black Consciousness roots: the use of ‘Azania’ rather than ‘South Africa’. As we have seen in the debates at the formation of COSAS, naming was the first and most public declaration of a group’s political affiliations. In the case of AZASO, the renaming to SANSCO sought to do just that, but it did not signify any changes in policy, which had already been consolidated after its break with AZAPO. AZASO had been firmly charterist since 1980; now its name finally reflected that affiliation.

The South African Youth Congress and the re-emergence of Africanism

Outside AZASO’s and COSAS’s scope, political organization among younger students and non-student youth existed primarily within local youth congresses. These

⁴¹ Carl Schmitt, *The concept of the political* (University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2008), p. 26.

⁴² James Brennan, ‘Blood enemies: Exploitation and urban citizenship in the nationalist political thought of Tanzania, 1958-75’, *Journal of African History*, 47 (2006), pp. 389-413; Magaziner, *The law and the prophets*, p. 140.

⁴³ Marks, *Young warriors*, p. 129.

organizations existed around the country – in urban townships and rural villages – and cut across a swathe of black South African society. Nominally, at least, they were charterist, having emerged in the early 1980s during charterism's renaissance.⁴⁴ But Charles Carter's interviews with activists in the Alexandra Youth Congress (AYCO) reveal that though 'identifying with the Freedom Charter [...] enhanced organizational activity', activists' attachment to the Charter was not necessarily ideological. As one activist explained,

AYCO never had a problem of a line [of ideology], because COSAS never had a problem of a line. We just took the Freedom Charter, which had been in circulation since 1980. We just became non-racial from the start. We didn't have a problem with this, because we felt if there were problems, then the national movement would deal with the problems.⁴⁵

This was an organizational triumph for the ANC in exile, which made a concerted effort to mobilize activists within South Africa around the Charter, particularly in reference to its thirtieth anniversary in 1985.⁴⁶ Their success is evident in its adoption by groups like AYCO, but it is equally evident that the Charter was embraced more as a symbol than for its ideological content. As Shireen Hassim has written about women's movements of the 1980s, among youth groups adoption of the Charter became shorthand for affiliation with the banned ANC.⁴⁷

AYCO was one of hundreds of similar youth congresses across South Africa in the mid-1980s. When the matter of uniting these groups arose, the new South African Youth Congress (SAYCO), rather than its student-run counterparts, took the lead. The first steps toward founding a national youth organization were taken in mid-1986, when youth leaders Peter Mokaba and Deacon Mathe traveled to meet with ANC leadership in exile to discuss plans for the new youth body.⁴⁸ In Harare, Zimbabwe they discussed direction and political content of the new organization with ANC leadership, thereby linking SAYCO more closely to the ANC than any youth organization inside South Africa had been since the ANC Youth League became defunct in 1960. Though the ANC had maintained a National Youth Secretariat at its headquarters in Lusaka, Zambia, this body primarily coordinated youth affairs for the party in exile and was not closely involved in youth politics inside the country.

The ANC's support may have been motivated by the need to keep South Africa's youth under control, as well as by the desire to unite groups under the Freedom Charter and to extend its political hegemony. An ANC document produced by the National Consultative Conference in 1985 discussed the need to manage the political zeal of youth:

⁴⁴ The earliest youth congresses predated the UDF and came out of COSAS' desire to establish structures for non-student youth around 1982. These were primarily confined to urban areas, and it was not until the mid-1980s that the movement reached rural areas.

⁴⁵ AYCO activist interviewed June 1990, quoted in Carter, "We are the progressives": Alexandra Youth Congress activists', p. 207.

⁴⁶ See Raymond Suttner and Jeremy Cronin, *30 years of the Freedom Charter* (Ravan Press, Johannesburg, 1986).

⁴⁷ Shireen Hassim, *Women's organizations and democracy in South Africa: Contesting authority* (University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, WI, 2006), p. 142.

⁴⁸ Shelagh Gastrow, *Who's who in South African politics*, 5th edn (Ravan Press, Johannesburg, 1995), p. 193.

The youth is as enthusiastic in its search for knowledge as it is militant in the fight for the realization of the ideals it holds dear. [...] Due to their inexperience and illusions bred of their psychological make-up, young people can be easily swayed into positions that are counter to their interests.⁴⁹

Similarly, Hugh Macmillan has noted that the ANC in exile had long wanted to harness the political potential of youth inside South Africa, particularly after the Soweto uprising. A 1979 presidential report worried that ‘we will fritter away the considerable talent of our youth and lose it to reactionary politics and wasting life styles’.⁵⁰ These concerns were part of the larger hegemonic project that occupied the ANC throughout the 1980s. Their support for building a national structure to organize youth under a charterist banner demonstrates that this was still a priority when they participated in the planning for SAYCO, a decade after 1976.

SAYCO was finally launched in March 1987. It was the product of the broad network of local and regional youth congresses across South Africa and operated primarily as a coordinating body for these groups that had emerged during the early and mid 1980s. It adopted the ideals of the Freedom Charter, aligned itself with the ANC (even seeking the approval of the party in exile), and worked to unite the disparate, localized congresses that had come to characterize youth politics across the country. In this SAYCO differed from the student and youth movements that had preceded it: it gathered together a vast constituency that had already organized itself into units. Estimates of SAYCO’s size vary widely (from approximately 200,000 up to two million), due to the lack of consistent record-keeping and membership requirements among its affiliates, but even the smallest estimates suggest it was demographically significant, and larger than its predecessors.⁵¹ Uniting this vast base around a common ideology and exerting organizational cohesion was a primary challenge for SAYCO’s new executive committee.

The ANC’s influence on SAYCO is evident from their consultation in its founding, and also in its constitution, which advocates adherence to the Freedom Charter and nonracialism. In the preamble, SAYCO’s founders declared themselves dedicated to the creation of ‘a free, unitary, non-racial and democratic South African culture’.⁵² Yet alongside this professed charterism, SAYCO sometimes seemed to straddle an array of ideas. It exhibited a strong Leninist-Marxist strand (contrasting its fellow charterist organization, AZASO, which had been so critical of socialism), and while professing to support nonracialism, its populist president Peter Mokaba often invoked African identity politics to rouse his base.

Mokaba’s populism and Africanism sat uncomfortably with UDF leaders, who made an (unsuccessful) attempt to marginalize him in the late 1980s.⁵³ In turn, African leaders inside the UDF, including Mokaba, responded forcefully to what they saw as a ‘cabal’ within the UDF. Race was explicitly at issue: the prominence of Indian leaders like Treasurer Azhar Cachalia and General Secretary Valli Moosa in the UDF reinforced the idea that African leaders were being marginalized within the Front. The controversy

⁴⁹ ‘National Preparatory Committee Documents’, ANC National Consultative Conference, June 1985, p. 22. [WHP AG2510 A.2]

⁵⁰ ‘President’s draft report’ May 1979, quoted in Hugh Macmillan, *The Lusaka years: The ANC in exile in Zambia, 1963-1994* (Jacana Media, Johannesburg, 2013), p. 136.

⁵¹ Seekings, *The UDF*, p. 210.

⁵² SAYCO Constitution, 1.1 Preamble. [South African History Archive (hereafter SAHA) AL2457 J7]

⁵³ *City Press*, ‘Inside the UDF’s secret society’, 25 November 1990. [GPP]

around the cabal issue reflects a breakdown of nonracialism in practice and rhetoric within some of the UDF's structures, as well as the complicated internal politics of the UDF. These encompassed a wide breadth of ideologies among its activists and organizations, from socialist to capitalist to Africanist. Increasingly, SAYCO was straddling these; though it paid lip service to nonracialism, it was deeply enmeshed in the racial politics of the UDF.

Glaser has noted that SAYCO 'was an organization that relied on charismatic leadership and a spontaneous following' due to the difficulty it faced in maintaining regular structures during the repressive late 1980s.⁵⁴ Consequently, it mobilized large groups around particular issues but was less able to exert organizational cohesion through its ranks. This was not necessarily a political disadvantage; it allowed Mokaba and other leaders to use Africanist rhetoric that sometimes challenged nonracialism, but that rallied their substantial youth base. In one speech Mokaba deftly deployed a class-centric Marxist-Leninist critique of apartheid, modified with a particularly Africanist slant, saying, 'No genuine revolutionary, no honest man or woman can deny that the African people in South Africa are locked in the Bantustans, single sex hostels, and compounds [...] not because they are workers, but because they are black and African.'⁵⁵ Mokaba's use of Africanist rhetoric marks its reintegration into the mainstream of youth politics, which had been sidelined since the split between AZAPO and AZASO in 1980. As I have argued, that split ended the permissive space for co-existence of Africanist, Black Consciousness, and charterist ideologies in student organization that existed during the late 1970s. When SAYCO leaders began to adopt some Africanist ideas, however, they did so without acknowledging their origins; for the first time since the PAC had split from the ANC, Africanism was being employed under the banner of charterism, rather than in competition with it. This marked an important step in the movement toward absorbing, and thus co-opting, competing ideologies into the scope of nonracial charterism.

Mokaba's ability to use rhetoric that did not adhere strictly to the letter of nonracialism was one facet of SAYCO's prized autonomy. Following Shireen Hassim's use of Molyneux to explore the issue of autonomy within women's movements of the 1980s, I characterize the autonomy that SAYCO achieved from 1987-1990 as 'associational autonomy'.⁵⁶ SAYCO existed in alliance with the United Democratic Front, but it retained its ability to make decisions of policy and practice independently from the UDF. In fact, a great deal of SAYCO's constitution is devoted to its autonomy, stressing that 'The central administration of SAYCO rests in its own decision making structures alone [...].'⁵⁷ even while affirming SAYCO's connection to other 'fraternal organizations' with which it shared membership, including the UDF: 'Those members who take an active part in fraternal organizations [...] are obliged to carry out decisions without endangering the independence of SAYCO'.⁵⁸ The tension between SAYCO's autonomy and its place amongst a wide array of movements pushing for democratic change in South

⁵⁴ Clive Glaser, *The ANC Youth League*, (Jacana Media, Johannesburg, 2012), p. 96.

⁵⁵ Peter Mokaba, 'The Theory of the South African Revolution', National Youth Workshop 25-26 October 1986. [WHP AG2386 D2]

⁵⁶ Hassim, *Women's organizations and democracy in South Africa*, pp. 10-11.

⁵⁷ SAYCO Constitution, 2.4 Independence. [SAHA AL2457 J7]

⁵⁸ SAYCO Constitution, 2.3 Rights and Duties of Members. [SAHA AL2457 J7]

Africa shaped the movement. It allowed the use of rhetoric that challenged its explicitly nonracial ideology, but it also straddled a constant dilemma between independence and belonging.

This problem was recognized and addressed by the SAYCO executive after unbanning in 1990, when they decided to move 'from a federal structure to a unitary structure'. The result of this move was a significant loss of the autonomy that SAYCO branches had maintained from 1987-1990. As an article in its newsletter *The Young Lion* announced,

This means all SAYCO affiliates are to lose their autonomy. The system of democratic centralism will come [in] the place of a federal system. All youth congresses will now be SAYCO branches. They will all work on the basis of the SAYCO policy and constitution.⁵⁹

It also meant that what scope there had been for articulating ideological difference inside SAYCO, born of its loose structures and of leadership that rhetorically straddled ideologies, narrowed considerably. *The Young Lion* went on to state that SAYCO's now 'common understanding of the national democratic struggle' was reflected in 'the adoption of the Freedom Charter, the adoption of the colours green, black, and gold, and the recognition of the ANC's leadership in the liberation struggle'.⁶⁰ This turn, after unbanning, marks the ANC's successful consolidation of their leadership over one of the country's largest organized constituencies, and also, in the rhetoric of youth leaders like Mokaba, their co-option of the Africanist ideas that had begun to find space under the banner of Charterism. How these ideas were developed, changed, and eventually marginalized in the democratic era is explored in the next section.

The ANC Youth League and youth politics after apartheid

SAYCO's abandonment of its federal structure and embrace of the unbanned ANC presaged a major development in nonracial youth politics in the early 1990s: the re-launch of the ANC Youth League (ANCYL). The League, which had been defunct since banning in 1960, became the organization that would lead South Africa's charterist youth into the post-apartheid era. After unbanning there was a scramble amongst organizations for primacy in the effort to re-launch it. Among internal activists, the push was led by SAYCO. In Mokaba's presidential address at the SAYCO Conference in April 1990 (at which Nelson and Winnie Mandela represented the ANC) he called for reconstituting the moribund ANCYL, and was keen that SAYCO should be at the forefront of this initiative: 'The ability of Sayco to exist and grow in conditions of concentrated enemy fire is the history and experience that the new organization the ANC Youth League cannot do without.'⁶¹ This statement implicitly takes aim at SAYCO's main competition in the formation of the new ANCYL: the National Youth Secretariat (NYS), having spent the struggle in exile, had not endured 'the concentrated enemy fire' Mokaba described. Thanks in large part to his efforts, the ANCYL that emerged from the negotiations resembled SAYCO far more than the NYS. The (now no longer federal) structures of SAYCO became the unitary structure of the ANCYL, and the membership of SAYCO

⁵⁹ *The Young Lion*, 'SAYCO: The move to a federal structure', June 1990, p. 2. [WHP AG2386 D2]

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ Peter Mokaba, SAYCO National Congress Presidential Address, 1990. [SAHA AL2425]

branches became members of the ANC Youth League. As one activist noted of his local youth congress, the Sekhukhune Youth Organization (SEYO), 'what actually [was] SEYO became branches of the Youth League and the ANC.'⁶²

Even under these new, more rigid ideological conditions, Mokaba was a firebrand who acquired a reputation for inflammatory rhetoric during the negotiations between the ANC, the National Party, and other political stakeholders in the final years of apartheid. Much of his rhetoric during this transition was highly racialized, belying the nonracial, 'rainbow nation' narrative that ANC leadership like Nelson Mandela presented. Mokaba became known for singing the inflammatory song, '*Dubul' iBhunu*' or 'Shoot the boer'. His heated words to a loyal and impressionable youth base had the power to ignite further violence during the volatile early 1990s, a period when the politics of enmity – and purging – was at its height in South Africa.⁶³ They also defied the ANC's own rhetoric of nonracialism.

To an extent, the ANC allowed this dissention. Anthony Butler has noted that the post-apartheid ANC is characterized by 'a complex system of alliances that allow diverse class, ideological, gender, and generational differences to be expressed and yet at the same time remain incorporated into a wider project.'⁶⁴ But in order to remain incorporated there are limits on such expression. When competing ideas within the fold blatantly subvert official dogma like nonracialism they are brought into line or are excluded from the 'broad church' of the ANC. This process has characterized the party's relationship to its Youth League over its years in governance and during the transition of the early 1990s. Peter Mokaba's singing of '*Dubul' iBhunu*' challenged the ANC's rhetoric of cooperation during the delicate period of negotiations, and he was censured for it by the party in May 1993.⁶⁵ Nearly twenty years later, another Youth League president, Julius Malema, was similarly rebuked for singing the same song.⁶⁶ Raphaël Botiveau has suggested that the unruliness of the Youth League was politically expedient for the ANC itself during negotiations; it cast the main party as a moderate alternative to a fractious and possibly dangerous youth wing at a time when many South Africans feared a violent insurrection.⁶⁷ I would further suggest that the ability of the ANC to publically exert control over the League, as it has done with Mokaba and other youth leaders, solidifies this position. It enables it to consolidate its political hegemony by bringing its allies into tighter control, which also broadens its appeal to potential supporters.

This double-edged effect of the ANCYL's insubordination may explain some of the leeway that the ANC has given it. Mokaba's rhetoric and the League's public criticisms of the negotiations process demonstrate that, even after SAYCO abandoned its federal

⁶² Interview, Mpho Nchabeleng, Pretoria, 22 October 2011.

⁶³ In the early 1990s South Africa was rocked by violence between ANC supporters and supporters of the Inkatha Freedom Party. Some alleged these clashes were fueled by a covert 'third force' in a government effort to undermine the transition to majority rule. For more on this see Stephen Ellis, 'The historical significance of South Africa's third force', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 24, 2 (1998), pp. 261-99.

⁶⁴ Anthony Butler, *The idea of the ANC*, (Jacana Media, Johannesburg, 2012), p. 70.

⁶⁵ Peter Mokaba, "'Kill the boer" is merely a chant', *The Star*, 15 May 1993. [GPP]

⁶⁶ Fiona Forde, *An inconvenient youth: Julius Malema and the 'new' ANC*, (Portobello Books, London, 2012), p. 60.

⁶⁷ Raphaël Botiveau, 'The ANC Youth League, or the invention of a South African youth political organisation', *Les Nouveaux Cahiers de l'IFAS (Institut Français d'Afrique du Sud)*, 2007, p. 52.

structure, youth in the charterist movement still retained some public autonomy and used it to dissent from the main party.⁶⁸ I suggest, though, that this autonomy was mostly nominal – the ANCYL could voice dissent, but not act on it – and, following Botiveau, that occasional public displays of rebelliousness benefitted the main party as well as the Youth League. It differed substantively from the ability of earlier youth organizations to determine their own policies and practices, like the associational autonomy that SAYCO had under the UDF.

Deborah Posel has pointed to this kind of public autonomy in the ANCYL as a key factor in opening ‘a space of ideological and political unruliness [...] within the ANC.’⁶⁹ I argue that the ANCYL’s ideological ‘unruliness’ can be traced even earlier, to the student and youth groups that played influential roles in its founding. Perhaps rather than ‘unruly’ this is better understood as a fluid capacity for adopting and adapting aspects of different ideologies as its own, at least in a rhetorical sense. They often instrumentalized the expression of ideas for political ends (as SAYCO used Africanism to negotiate the racial politics within the UDF). The ANCYL inherited this practice from SAYCO, which in turn had adopted both COSAS and AZASO’s capacity to straddle ideologies. As Posel suggests, this fluid ideology is something that has endured in the post-apartheid era. But as my discussion of the new form that the ANCYL’s autonomy took suggests, the ways in which the ANCYL uses different ideologies are much more constrained by its relationship to its parent body than any of its predecessors in the 1980s.

By the middle of the 1990s, the Youth League’s rhetorical use of ideology was shifting. Clive Glaser has indicated that during negotiations the ANCYL began to ‘drift rightwards’, leaving the revolutionary Marxism of SAYCO behind.⁷⁰ This, at least in part, was due to alliances formed with both Thabo Mbeki and Winnie Mandela, who were both ANC Africanists, with little affinity for Marxism.⁷¹ Mokaba himself became a business owner, and he, and later his successor Malusi Gigaba, supported Thabo Mbeki’s platform of ‘African Renaissance’ and a general trend to the political right in the ANC itself.⁷² (Mbeki’s biographer, Mark Gevisser, has described the 1998 introduction of African Renaissance as something that ‘could have been lifted straight out of the SASO Policy Manifesto’ of 1971, and as a marker of Mbeki’s adherence to Black Consciousness.⁷³) But in this period ideology took a back seat to what Glaser has called the League’s ‘bureaucratic centralism’ under Gigaba, and its deference to the guidance of the ANC.⁷⁴ Ironically, given the moment of Mbeki’s African Renaissance, this shift away from deeper ideological engagement in youth politics left the questions about race that Black Consciousness had privileged in its philosophy unresolved.

Notably, this happened in tandem with a growing politics of accumulation in the Youth League; by 2005 William Gumede described the League as ‘the playground of yuppie

⁶⁸ *The Young Lion*, ‘Negotiations: The road ahead’, June 1990, pp. 5-8. [WHP AG2386 D2]; *Weekly Mail and Guardian* ‘Why can’t the ANC get rid of Mokaba? He’s too powerful’, 20 August 1993. [GPP]

⁶⁹ Deborah Posel, ‘The ANC Youth League and the politicization of race’, *Thesis Eleven* 115, 58 (2013), pp. 58-76, p.64.

⁷⁰ Glaser, *The ANC Youth League*, pp. 107-8.

⁷¹ Mark Gevisser, *Thabo Mbeki: The dream deferred* (Jonathan Ball, Johannesburg, 2007), pp. 633-6.

⁷² For a discussion of Mbeki’s African Nationalism and the idea of the African Renaissance, see Gevisser, *Thabo Mbeki*, pp.583-92; for his relationship with Mokaba, see pp. 633-7.

⁷³ *Ibid.* pp. 322-25.

⁷⁴ Glaser, *The ANC Youth League*, pp.118-9.

politicians who drive smart cars and live the high life'.⁷⁵ For the first time in generations, being a young black activist in South Africa afforded opportunities *within* the state, rather than a lifetime of struggle against it. During the 1990s and 2000s members of the ANCYL executive leveraged their positions as points of entry into business and national politics. Tom Lodge has pointed to the ANCYL and its politics of conspicuous consumption as a key factor in the growth of neo-patrimonialism and decline in ideological adherence in the ANC itself.⁷⁶

After more than a decade of loyalty, in 2005 under the leadership of Fikile Mbalula the ANCYL began to vocally oppose Mbeki and shifted its support to Jacob Zuma. This seemed an astonishing 'somersault'⁷⁷ to observers, particularly as the ANCYL forged alliances on the political left (notably with the communist party and unions), which it had previously reviled. (The Youth League had not advocated leftist policies of redistribution since the early 1990s.) In December 2007 at the ANC Conference in Polokwane, this alliance succeeded in ousting Mbeki from power. Zuma was elected president of the party, and less than a year later Mbeki was effectively deposed as the head of state. Only a few years later, the League once again abandoned the party president – now Zuma – in favour of a new candidate, and a new ideological platform of 'economic freedom for all'.⁷⁸

A great deal has been written about these events⁷⁹, but they are particularly revealing when considered in light of the ANCYL's use of ideology: after years of autonomy in-name-only, the League asserted an ideological difference from the ANC. Did this represent a re-engagement with ideas in youth politics, after the relative neglect of ideology since the mid-1990s? I would argue that something more pragmatic, and reminiscent of the late 1980s, was at work. Like SAYCO before it, the Youth League of the late 2000s was comfortable mixing aspects of different ideologies to suit its political purposes. In terms of demographics, racialized language, and tendencies to use African identity as a cohesive tool, it exhibited strains of Africanism, and was enmeshed in a process of capitalist accumulation; but in the face of shifting factional politics within the ANC, the League was able to turn *volte-face* and adopt a rhetoric of economic redistribution and nationalization in 2011 that countered their earlier position. In spite of this rhetoric of redistribution, the politics of accumulation endured inside the ANCYL, supporting the contention that alliances and factions matter more than political ideology in the organization.

Julius Malema, president of the ANCYL from 2008 until his expulsion in 2012, was partly responsible for the ideological shift to the left; in spite of accusations of hypocrisy in light of the accumulative politics of the League (which many thought Malema

⁷⁵ William Gumede, *Thabo Mbeki and the battle for the soul of the ANC*, 2nd edn. (Zebra Press, Cape Town, 2007), p. 184.

⁷⁶ Tom Lodge, 'Neo-patrimonial politics in the ANC', *African Affairs* 113, 450 (2014), pp.1-23.

⁷⁷ Gumede, *Thabo Mbeki and the battle for the soul of the ANC*, p.184

⁷⁸ Some commentators perceived this shift as hypocritical, arguing that 'economic freedom' did not equate to the implied economic justice. Ebrahim Fakir and Eusebius McKaiser, 'Malema's great ideological irony', *Mail and Guardian*, 27 January 2012, < <http://mg.co.za/article/2012-01-27-malemas-great-ideological-irony>> (6 June 2015)

⁷⁹ In particular see Frank Chikane, *Eight days in September: The removal of Thabo Mbeki* (Picador Africa, Johannesburg, 2012) for the ousting of Mbeki; and Glaser, *The ANC Youth League*, pp. 137-51, for the ANCYL's abandonment of Zuma and the subsequent battle within the ANC.

embodied), the new platform found traction among many South Africans. This new ideological turn – and renewed rebelliousness – in the Youth League presented an unacceptable challenge to the ANC's hegemony and Jacob Zuma's position as president, though. After being expelled from the ANC, Malema launched a new political party, the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) based on the principles of redistribution and nationalization that he had adopted in 2011. This marked a new engagement outside the ANC-Charterist fold with some of the (economic) ideals that had been sidelined by the compromises of democracy, like the neo-liberal Growth, Employment and Redistribution programme of 1996.⁸⁰

Notably, these principles remained popular within the ANC Youth League after Malema's expulsion. An executive member of the ANCYL provincial structure in Limpopo said that even after the formation of the EFF, he and others would continue to champion the cause of economic freedom within the ANCYL, in spite of the failure of the ANC itself to support this platform. When asked why he didn't defect to the EFF since he supported its policies, he explained, 'No, we must bring about change from the inside.'⁸¹

Conclusion

The ideological porosity described to me by the Youth League activist in Limpopo – in which the same ideas are present in two opposing organizations – is reminiscent of the student and youth structures of the 1980s, and I argue it has its roots there. That capacity for ideological fluidity in the ANCYL today is inherited from SAYCO and its predecessors. It comes from a tradition of ideas that were sometimes overshadowed by political expediencies and shaped by the politics of enmity and alliances in the many student and youth organizations that participated in South Africa's struggle for liberation.

That fluid ideological space is also increasingly constrained by the hegemony of its parent party. After its expulsion of Malema and his executive in 2011, the ANC dismantled the structures of the ANCYL in all of South Africa's provinces over several months in 2012-13. These were replaced by Task Teams, which were appointed by the ANC Secretary General and responsible for 'rebuilding' the League, a process that lasted more than a year and stripped the ANCYL of much of its weight in internal party politics.⁸² By dismantling the Youth League in the wake of Malema's disciplinary infractions and ideological dissent from the party, the ANC signaled clearly that the remaining space for expressing aspects of opposing ideologies within its ranks was closing.

This was a process that had begun decades before; the scope for deeply interrogating differing ideologies like charterism and Africanism, and for them to truly coexist in one organization, fundamentally narrowed in the mid-1980s. In contrast to the relatively permissive space for diverse ideological engagement that had existed in COSAS during

⁸⁰ For more on GEAR, see Marais, *South Africa: Limits to change*, pp.161-3.

⁸¹ Interview, ANCYL activist, Modimolle, Limpopo, 17 November 2013.

⁸² Interview, three ANCYL activists, Modimolle, Limpopo, 17 November 2013; Khuthala Nandipha, 'ANC Youth League task team dissolves four provinces', *Mail and Guardian*, 10 June 2013, <<http://mg.co.za/article/2013-06-10-anc-youth-league-task-team-dissolves-four-provinces>> (4 June 2015).

its early years, the fraught conflict between AZASO and AZASM hardened the ideological lines between charterist and Black Consciousness student organizations. By the time SAYCO reprised some Africanist language, drawing out a number of racial tensions in its relationship to the UDF, it had lost Black Consciousness' broader understanding of 'black' as well as its desire to create a new discursive space within the liberation struggle. Under SAYCO, and under the ANC Youth League as well, this ideological language came to be used to articulate discontent with a 'parent' body – as in the case of the UDF 'cabal', and concerns over the ANC's negotiations and later leadership, rather than a new (or old) ideological turn.

These hardening lines did not necessarily represent a deeper investment in the tenets of charterism, Black Consciousness, or Africanism, though. Young activists used these ideologies in fluid and flexible ways to straddle allegiances (with groups like the ANC and UDF), to extend their reach (as with COSAS' tacit allowance of Black Consciousness branches), to defend organizational turf (in AZASO and AZASM's battle for dominance on campuses), and to appeal to particular constituencies (as Peter Mokaba's populist Africanism did). This instrumentalization of ideological categories began in the 1980s, and has remained a feature of youth politics in South Africa today.